Investigating Different English Dialects and the Controversies Surrounding Them

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ABSTRACT: Here I will write a summary of my paper.

KEYWORDS: *keyword for this.*

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The United States of America is a diverse country made up of many different groups of people each with their own different culture. While the food, music, and style differ between these groups, most share a common language of English. However, the ways in which each group uses and shapes the English language are different. American English dialects, as they are called, can be different between various locations or regions of the U.S. and different groups of people. For example, those who live in the southern United States speak differently and use different words than those who live in other areas of the country. Discussion of these different types of English often lead to arguments questioning their validity as a form of the English language and which of these dialects is right or wrong.

Standard English is always a topic of debate when discussing the dialects in the United States. According to Merriam-Webster, Standard English is “the English that with respect to spelling, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary is substantially uniform though not devoid of regional differences, that is well established by usage in the formal and informal speech and writing of the educated, and that is widely recognized as acceptable wherever English is spoken and understood” (“Standard English,” n.d.). Education has taught Standard English to students as the correct way to use English in their writing and speech. Some see Standard English as another dialect of the English language and not as the only correct way to use English. While Standard English is not the only way to use English, it is viewed by many as being better than other dialects. Standard English is the common language in academic and professional settings, and this may be the reason as to why people view it as the better dialect. However, as Daniel A. Heller (1994) said, “If we are careful to let students know that different modes of discourse are appropriate in different situations, then standard English simply becomes the appropriate language for certain times” (p. 18). While standard English may be the best dialect to use in professional situations, it is not necessarily the dialect of choice in other non-professional situations. For example when talking to friends and family, using a dialect that comes naturally to you would work better than standard English. A dialect is neither right nor wrong; given certain circumstances one just may work better than the other in the situation.

Another dialect that has been argued about is Ebonics. On one side there are individuals who view it as a valid dialect with great cultural value, but on the other side individuals view it as slang and broken English. These opposing views clashed in 1996 when the Oakland Unified School District school board recognized it as a language and that it should be integrated into the classroom to help those who used Ebonics to learn standard English (“Oakland Ebonics,” 2016). This ruling caused a lot of controversy and discussion about the legitimacy of certain ways of speech. In his article “Sociolinguistic and Ideological Dynamics of the Ebonics Controversy,” Richard L. Wright (1998) addressed controversy surrounding Ebonics and the Oakland Unified School District’s resolution. Regarding the language of the resolution Wright said, “The inclusion of the term, ‘genetically based’ . . . indicates the lengths to which framers of this resolution believed they had to go in order to ensure that Ebonics was advanced as a language system independent of and distinct from English, and not as a dialect of English” (p. 9). The school board may have had good intentions with this resolution, but the wording was seen as racist by some of the public. People are not genetically predisposed to speak a certain way based on their race, but rather they develop their way of speech from life experiences, who the people around them are, and cultural influences.

A similar situation occurred in Hawaii concerning Hawaii Creole English (HCE). It began when it was found that a couple of teachers were talking to their students using HCE in the classroom instead of standard English. Unlike the Oakland Unified School District school board, the Hawaii State Board of Education banned the use of the dialect in question. People were angry at this decision because “HCE was a native language of many of Hawaii’s youths” (Tamura, 2002, p. 20). Our language is a part of who we are and taking it away from us is wrong.

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